



City of Fitchburg

# Implementation Update: Economic Development Strategic Plan

September 21, 2023

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# Brief Chronology:

- **[2017-2018]:** Public process for plan creation w/ (consultant) UMass Boston Collins Center & 26-member steering committee
- **Sept. 2018:** Fitchburg receives *Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)* designation from MassDev't. & 3-year fellow plus support resources
- **Oct. 2018:** City Council adopts Economic Development Strategic Plan
- **Dec. 2018:** Patronicity/Commonwealth Places crowdfunding toward Mill Street placemaking improvements (\$40K match awarded from MassDev't.)
- **[Nov 2019 – Jun 2021]:** Zoning Ordinance overhaul w/ BSC Group (consultant)

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## ➤ **March 2020: COVID PANDEMIC CAUSES HARD LOCKDOWN & ALL-REMOTE**

- All municipal services & permitting immediately go virtual (within days)
- City deploys (30) *Emergency Mini-Grants* to Fitchburg small businesses (April 2020)
- FRA deploys (30) *Resiliency Grants* to support Fitchburg small businesses
- City expedites *Outdoor Patio Seating* approvals for restaurants
- City hosts bi-weekly *Reopening Fitchburg Task Force (RFTF)* mtgs, by sector
- City & FRA both deploy 2<sup>nd</sup> rounds of emergency grants (30 businesses each)

## The Work Continues, in a 'New Normal'

- Public process for design of Main St./Boulder Dr. conversion to 2-way travel
- **Dec. 2020:** Fitchburg City Hall renovation construction completed
- **[Jun 2021-Jun 2022]:** Main St./Boulder Dr. (2-way) construction underway
- **Summer 2021:** Great Wolf Lodge reopens (after 15 month COVID closure)
- **Sept. 2021:** MassDevt. grants Fitchburg additional 4<sup>th</sup> year of TDI support
- **Sept. 2021:** Game On Fitchburg fully opens
- **June 2022:** Main/Boulder opens to 2-way travel
- **Summer 2022:** Adoption of final Zoning Amendment updates by City Council
- **Autumn 2022:** MassDevt. awards Creative Cities to Fitchburg (2 yrs of funding)

## Valuable Pandemic Take-Aways:

- Business Retention is equally as important as attracting new ventures (must support & celebrate what we have)
- Virtual meetings & municipal services are now permanent (hybrid approach)
- Entrepreneurialism significantly increased during tough times
- Major projects & initiatives can be completed during a prolonged crisis
  - Zoning Amendment overhaul
  - City Hall renovation
  - Main/Boulder 2-way conversion

# Fitchburg's Economic Development Strategy:

- Thorough 'SWOT' analysis led to broad Vision Statement:

***Fitchburg offers the amenities of urban living surrounded by a picturesque rural landscape***

- Approach revealed 8 Sub-Goals:

- DOWNTOWN
- UNIVERSITY TOWN/EDUCATION
- FAMILY-FRIENDLY
- QUALITY HOUSING STOCK
- MIX OF BUSINESSES
- DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS
- COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE
- TRANSPORTATION

- Plan includes 183 action items

- Implementation to occur over approx. 5-year period (Fall 2018-Fall 2023)

## Goal: **DOWNTOWN:**

*Make Fitchburg's downtown a vibrant, attractive, mixed-use destination that is active throughout the week, both daytime & into the evening.*

- Sub-Goal D-1: **Safety, cleanliness, attractiveness downtown**

- ✓ **D1-1: Expand code enforcement efforts** (vacant/underutilized bldgs.)
  - **Vacant Property Registry** (new) & **municipal hearing officer** (new)
- ✓ **D1-2: Community Policing** (foot & bicycle patrols; downtown presence)
- ✓ **D1-3: Façade Improvement Program** (bldg. exteriors & signage)
  - **TDI local, CDBG, & targeted FRA funding**
- ✓ **D1-4: Evaluate existing roadway/sidewalk conditions** (ADA, lighting, etc)
  - **Main/Boulder redesign project**
- ✓ **D1-4a: Evaluate results of (2017) temp. Main St. pilot** (1-lane)
  - **Main/Boulder redesign project**

## Goal: DOWNTOWN, cont.:

- **D1-5: Highlight entrances to downtown** (physical gateways)
  - Murals were a start, but wayfinding signage needed
- ✓ **D1-6: Sustainable funding of downtown staff, programs, initiatives**
  - TDI, CDBG, university funds began effort (*establishing DMO is next step*)
- ✓ **D1-6a: Explore property owner funded model**
  - TDI analyzed Main Streets, BID and Community Benefits District (*options*)
- ✓ **D1-6b: Consider District Improvement Financing (DIF)**
  - TDI studied Downtown Mgmt. Organization (*structure, funding approach*)
- **Sub-Goal D-2: Host/Maintain Series of Events & Activities**
  - ✓ **D2-1: Learn (pros/cons) from organizers of annual events**
    - Civic Days, Blacksmith Festival, Nashua River Brewers Festival
  - ✓ **D2-2: Get business feedback on coordination of events**
    - protocols, timing, participation, direct benefits

## Goal: DOWNTOWN, cont.:

- ✓ D2-3: Support creation of Downtown Coordinator position
  - Ease event impediments, increase event quantity, engage families & youth
- ✓ D2-4: Downtown Coord. to seek feedback from broader community
  - Engagement with residents, businesses, arts community, FSU, city staff
- D2-5: Establish Calendar of Downtown Events
  - InTown site (still needs coord. w/ Library calendar & broader city calendar)
- ✓ D2-6: Annual city budget line item for event-related costs
  - Portion of Civic Days annual celebration
- ✓ D2-7: Facilitate using vacant spaces as “pop-up” shops
  - Bonfire Bookshop (pilot) became useful proof-of-concept

## Goal: **DOWNTOWN, cont.:**

- Sub-Goal D-3: Strive for mix of uses downtown (to attract public)
  - ✓ D3-1: Review dimensional requirements in Zoning Ordinance
    - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
  - ✓ D3-2: Amend zoning to attract pedestrian-oriented retail, dining
    - creation of Downtown Business (DB) & Intown Business (IB) districts
  - ✓ D3-3: Review zoning use table to assure desired uses are allowed
    - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
  - ✓ D3-4: Amend zoning to allow for small/medium sized storefronts
    - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
  - ✓ D3-5: Encourage creation of outdoor dining in downtown
    - Pandemic expedited patio seating was necessity & now more occurring
  - ✓ D3-6: Encourage creation of co-working spaces downtown
    - ideaLab was first example & soon Fitchburg Public Mkt. (shared comml. kitchen)

## Goal: DOWNTOWN, cont.:

- ✓ D3-7: Increase multi-family housing in/near downtown
  - Creation of MGL ch.40R Smart Growth district; also MBTA Communities zoning
- D3-8: Rezone Central Plaza site (Water St.) for transit-oriented devt.
  - Site is zoned Commercial, w/o transit-oriented requirement (mkt.-driven density)
- ✓ D3-9: Use Main/Boulder elevation change for tuck-under pkg.
  - Future mixed-use bldgs. (new construction) can use this approach
- ✓ D3-10: Consider 'Main Street America' nonprofit org. for downtown
  - InTown Fitchburg looked at this model when analyzing DMO approach
- ✓ D3-11: Promote existing small business loan program to downtown
  - city's CDBG funded program actively lending in downtown district
- ✓ D3-12: Advocate in support of City Hall, Theater Block & B.F. Brown
  - each of these 3 major "pipeline" projects has advanced; city hall completed
- ✓ D3-13: Support new mixed-use along Boulder Drive
  - Activation of Mill St. & pending Riverfront Park stage will be catalysts to more

# Goal: DOWNTOWN, cont.:

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- Sub-Goal D4: Access to downtown via multiple modes of transport

- ✓ D4-1: Review utilization day/eve/weekend use of city-owned pkg.

- Updated Boulder Dr. now provides for public use of lower-deck lot

- ✓ D4-2: Have professional pkg. study done of public lots/structures

- Nelson/Nygaard (pkg. experts) revealed issue is utilization rather than supply

- ✓ D4-3: Establish 'payment in lieu of parking' fund for developers

- Rezoning opted for reduced pkg. requirement due to current adequate supply

- ✓ D4-4: Redevelop city-owned Main St. pkg deck for mixed-use devt.

- Action was intended as long-term; redevt. of 'Johnsonia' lot likely to occur first

- ✓ D4-5: Ensure Twin Cities Rail Trail is well-connected to downtown

- TCRT (phase 1) completed; Phase 2 designed & construction to begin in 2025

- D4-6: Increase downtown bicycle amenities (lanes, pkg, rentals)

- Bike lane on Boulder Dr. & new bike shop, but racks & public rentals needed

- D4-7: Central Plaza redeveloper to create ADA access to bridge(s)

- Long-term goal if/when plaza redevelops; no planned TCRT connection to Mkt. Basket

## Goal: DOWNTOWN, cont.:

- Sub-Goal D-5: Recognize & build upon Fitchburg's historic architectural character

- ✓ D5-1: Pursue historic district designations where appropriate

- Moran Square district & Upper Common district both now established/approved

- ✓ D5-2: Restore old façade elements & retain key structures

- Harper Furniture, Summer St. firehouse, Fitchburg Gas & Light (all restored) & more

- ✓ D5-3: Create design standards for site plan review process

- Zoning Ordinance has design standards by use type (40R also has standards)

- ✓ D5-4: Consider forming a Design Review Commission (advisory)

- Concept considered but focus is toward ease of permitting & fewer barriers

## Goal: **EDUCATION/UNIVERSITY TOWN:**

*Embrace Fitchburg's role as a university town & continue to grow city's strong educational sector to provide residents/students of all ages with skills to compete successfully for today's jobs and those in the future.*

- Sub-Goal ED1: Increase connection between FSU, downtown & city overall
  - ✓ ED1-1: Make FSU to FPL route most pedestrian/cycle friendly in city
    - Main/Boulder project benefits & closure of Cushing St. (more work needed)
  - ✓ ED1-2: Consider cohesive lighting installation from FSU through downtown
    - Main/Boulder project has new lighting, (differs from FSU's North Street standard)
  - ED1-3: Increase bike amenities downtown & FSU to promote bikes use
    - minimal student use of bikes to ideaLab & lack of bike pkg downtown a hindrance
  - ✓ ED1-4: Survey FSU students on off-campus shopping wants/needs
    - 2023 MDI project surveyed FSU for Downtown Consumer Market Analysis study

## Goal: EDUCATION/UNIVERSITY TOWN, cont.:

- ✓ ED1-5: Consider free shuttle to downtown for FSU students
  - Both university (free shuttle to ideaLab) & MART offer student bus access downtown
- ED1-6: Encourage FSU to purchase goods/services from local businesses
  - Vendor is exclusive food service for campus; capture students/faculty as customers
- ✓ ED1-7: Have city reps participate in student orientation
  - Comm. Devt. staff attended “Rock the Block” orientation (more engagement needed)
- ✓ ED1-8: Expand # of businesses accepting FSU’s “One Card”
  - New restaurants made aware upon opening (many choose to affiliate)
- ED1-9: Improve bike/pedestrian connection to Wallace Civic Ctr./Coolidge
  - North St. lacks sidewalk to Wallace Civic Ctr. (satellite student pkg.) despite popular path
- Sub-Goal ED2: Embrace Fitchburg’s identity as a university town
- ✓ ED2-1: Identify communities w/ effective town-gown relationships
  - FSU/City reps visited Ohio State (town-gown conference) & local examples visited too
- ✓ ED2-2: Explore creation of formal “town-gown” partnership(s)
  - Both City & FAM have formal partner agreements w/ FSU on specific projects/programs

## Goal: EDUCATION/UNIVERSITY TOWN, cont.:

- ED2-3: Cultivate student leaders to serve on various planning committees
  - limited participation which resets with each academic year (consider faculty instead)
- ✓ ED2-4: Invite FSU president to make annual presentation to City Council
  - FSU president periodically presents to city regarding specific topics/projects
- ✓ ED2-5: Meet w/ new MWCC president & discuss city's support of plans
  - New multi-trade facility to launch at 271 Westminster St. in Fitchburg (PB approved)
- Sub-Goal ED3: Retain FSU/MWCC students in Fitchburg post-graduation
- ✓ ED3-1: Encourage student internships w/ city, businesses, nonprofits
  - City (Mayor's office) regularly has student interns from FSU & FPS (high school)
- ✓ ED3-2: Establish city/FAM internships for FSU students
  - City (Mayor's office) regularly has student interns (work w/ FAM to strengthen?)
- ED3-3: Help FSU promote job portal to local businesses & nonprofits
  - Fitchburg orgs mention lack of access to "pipeline" of FSU grads (improve dialog)

# Goal: **EDUCATION/UNIVERSITY TOWN, cont.:**

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- ✓ **ED3-4: Amend zoning for small-sized apts. suitable for recent grads**
  - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
- Sub-Goal ED4: Increase educational attainment/skills of local residents
- ✓ **ED4-1: Meet with Monty Tech (Continuing Ed) for added workforce devt.**
  - MassHire leads regional job training & FPS students can access Monty Tech training
- ✓ **ED4-2: Convene a 'Mayor's Education Coalition' w/ multi-year action plan**
  - Municipal efforts use School Committee & close collaboration (FPS, Monty Tech, FSU)
- **ED4-3: Encourage employers to offer on-site skills (i.e. ESL, other trainings)**
  - Commonwealth's workforce training fund remains underused (some local participants)
- ✓ **ED4-4: Consider how city bldgs. (Library) could be used for trainings**
  - Redesign/renovation of Public Library includes spaces for workshops & classes
- ✓ **ED4-5: Consider use of CDBG funds as scholarships for low/mod residents**
  - Both LELE (home daycare training) & new food entrepreneur programs funded w/ CDBG

## Goal: **EDUCATION/UNIVERSITY TOWN, cont.:**

- ✓ ED4-6: Leaders for Equitable Local Economies (LELE) daycare biz training
  - Fitchburg formal training program for home-based daycare operators (2 cohorts so far)
- ✓ ED4-7: Learn about MA Workforce Training Fund & use locally
  - Fitchburg employers have used program (\$ match aspect remains issue for some)
- ✓ ED4-8: During City Hall design, include space for community gatherings
  - Multiple rooms within renovated City Hall are used by aspects of community regularly

## Goal: **FAMILY-FRIENDLY:**

*Encourage continued expansion in the number & variety of family-friendly venues & activities, to attract visitors from throughout New England.*

- Sub-Goal F1: Encourage family-friendly businesses, for locals & tourists
- ✓ F1-1: Increase family-friendly dining downtown & citywide; review pkg.
  - Fitchburg's dining cluster is steadily increasing; pkg. not a barrier in downtown district

## Goal: **FAMILY-FRIENDLY, cont.:**

- ✓ F1-2: Construct pocket parks or play structures proximate to downtown
  - Creation of Abolitionist Park (new public open space); chalk art festival @ Lowe Park
- ✓ F1-3: Encourage gathering spaces for families & 'under 21' patrons
  - Fun Stuf Party Place (near downtown); Curious Escape Rooms; plazas @ Mill & Cushing
- ✓ F1-4: Increase quantity and length of off-road bicycle paths
  - TCRT phase 1 completed & phase 2 constr. to begin 2025; also existing Steamline Trail
- ✓ F1-5: Identify multiple locations for construction of new hotel(s)
  - Vacant land studied @ FIT (airport); Game On site; vacant tract of land @ Rt. 2A/Rt. 31
- ✓ F1-6: Encourage Great Wolf Lodge to offer 1-day passes for residents
  - Occasional promotions for local residents occur; low vacancy rate has GWL often full
- ✓ F1-7: Seek FAM, airport & theater groups input on family-friendly theme
  - FAM has robust youth programming; FIT (airport) hosts annual aviation fair (for kids)
- ✓ F1-8: Renovate/expand Library to become active gathering space
  - Library redesign complete & funding secured; constr. begins later in 2023

## Goal: **FAMILY-FRIENDLY, cont.:**

- Sub-Goal F2: Market positive image of city, highlighting amenities to offer
  - ➔ F2-1: Develop “tagline” uniquely representing city in a sentence or less
    - “InTown Fitchburg” branding (during TDI) but more needed to devise catchy tagline
  - ➔ F2-2: Work w/ professional mktg. firm to create/deploy cohesive strategy
    - “InTown Fitchburg” was downtown-specific; citywide branding identity needed for tourism
  - ✓ F2-3: Work w/ NCMCC to ensure mktg. message aligns w/ regional efforts
    - JATA (tourism bureau) actively promotes Fitchburg’s destinations (rec. & arts/culture)
  - ➔ F2-4: Devise mktg. platform (print, radio, web) celebrating city’s assets
    - city’s limited print mktg. has been regional; use other media (podcasts, web, radio)
  - ➔ F2-5: Create mktg. pamphlet focusing on family-friendly attractions
    - Prior ‘Welcome Kits’ material was attractive, but static & now stale; fresh material needed

## Goal: **QUALITY HOUSING STOCK:**

*Maintain an attractive, high-quality housing stock.*

- Sub-Goal H1: Identify opportunities for transformational multi-family housing
  - ✓ H1-1: Identify TOD locations downtown & elsewhere for mixed-use housing
    - Established Smart Growth district (MGL ch. 40R); MBTA Communities zoning compliance
  - H1-2: When mkt. forces dictate, adopt Inclusionary Housing ordinance
    - Doing so now would severely stall devt. due to rising costs (interest rates, materials/labor)
  - ✓ H1-3: Promote identified sites to experienced developers (HTC, LIHTC, HDIP)
    - City has experience developers who successfully completed projects & seek to do more
  - ✓ H1-4: Work w/ identified market-rate developer to seek HDIP funding
    - Pelletier Properties became Fitchburg's first HDIP project (7 townhouse apts.)
  - ✓ H1-5: Amend zoning in/near downtown for senior housing (indep. living)
    - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul

## Goal: **QUALITY HOUSING STOCK, cont.:**

- Sub-Goal H2: **Market housing stock to buyers/renters priced out of Boston area**
  - ✓ H2-1: Determine target mkt. for potential new Fitchburg residents
    - creatives, millennials, empy-nesters, professionals, young families
  - ✓ H2-2: Partner w/ R.E. community to devise sales pitch & ensure inventory
    - NCMAR events w/ city showcased Fitchburg's assets & taught brokers about city's merits
  - H2-3: Refine mktg. campaign for various audiences (creatives, Latinx, seniors)
    - Update of prior mktg. materials needed, tailoring message to specific target groups
  - ✓ H2-4: Market quality of Fitchburg's schools to realtors w/ materials
    - City devised "Welcome Kits" info package for NCMAR w/ educational institutions included
  - ✓ H2-5: Create downpayment assistance program to help mod. income buyers
    - City had program in past, but no local funding currently; MA Housing (up to \$50K) instead
  - H2-6: Encourage local employers to incent local home ownership
    - Private-sector companies may not have \$ resources to do so, but worth inquiring

## Goal: **QUALITY HOUSING STOCK, cont.:**

- Sub-Goal H3: Improve quality-of-life in Fitchburg neighborhoods
  - ✓ **H3-1:** **Implement NICE recommendations** (prior Harvard Innov. Field Lab collaboration)
    - City has active inter-dept. task force addressing code-delinquent properties & blight
  - **H3-2:** **Create pkg. plan to manage challenges in urban neighborhoods**
    - Rt. 12 (“Patch”) neighborhood & Cleghorn neighborhood most in need
  - **H3-3:** **Identify communities w/ similar housing stock & review their actions**
    - Other ‘gateway cities’ (Everett, Lynn, Worcester) would be useful comparisons

## Goal: **MIX OF BUSINESSES:**

*Support a diverse mix of businesses that offer good paying jobs & provide an opportunity for entrepreneurship.*

- Sub-Goal M1: Support redevelopment of key vacant/underutilized sites
  - **M1-1:** **Create area plan for reuse of Kmart plaza w/ mix of uses & less paving**
    - Property owner proposed housing concept in 2022; city did not support; must be proactive

## Goal: MIX OF BUSINESSES, cont.:

- M1-2: Consider use of limited-duration Special Permits for interim uses
  - Example would be proposed (temp.) sculpture park at “Johnsonia” lot (until site has RFP)
- Sub-Goal **M2**: Make city into dining/entertainment hub for region
  - ✓ M2-1: Convene restaurateurs to hear about their operating in city
    - virtual feedback (post-approvals) gathered via blind-surveys; results tallied/analyzed
  - ✓ M2-2: Review zoning for restaurants citywide & identify impediments
    - Impediments stem from condition of old/neglected properties, not zoning issues
  - ✓ M2-3(4): Encourage creation of outdoor seating & reduce impediments
    - Pandemic era accelerated this (during emergency) & many kept patios; new ones too
  - ✓ M2-4(5): Create multiple “parklets” downtown as pop-up outdoor patios
    - Fitchburg piloted 3 parklets both pre and post-pandemic; currently in storage for use
  - M2-5(6): Adopt local-option MA meals tax to gain revenue from dining
    - City postponed enacting years ago, but dining cluster now has grown (opportunity?)

## Goal: MIX OF BUSINESSES, cont.:

- Sub-Goal M3: Support diverse manufacturing ventures & recognize trends
  - M3-1: Convene focus group of local manufacturers for input on sector
    - Refresh relationships with longtime ones & engage new ones (cannabis cultivators)
  - ✓ M3-2: Consider rezoning some properties for flexibility in development
    - Adaptive Industrial (AI) overlay created during zoning overhaul
  - ✓ M3-3: Identify small fabricators and convene for input & feedback
    - Artisanal manufacturing is new use category from zoning overhaul; gather sector for mtg.
  - ✓ M3-4: Encourage creation of makerspace(s) for shared use
    - Fitchburg Arts Community to have on-site; & 35 Daniels St. may be reused for this
  - M3-5: Identify vacant/underutilized sites & impediments to their reuse
    - Refresh prior data sets & consider development potential given latest zoning

## Goal: MIX OF BUSINESSES, cont.:

- Sub-Goal M4: Support professional/technical sector & incoming ventures

- M4-1: Actively promote city's affordable housing & two MBTA stations

- Emphasize quality-of-life assets to employers/employees in this sector

- ✓ M4-2: Identify key locations near MBTA stations where commercial is sought

- Focus is on mixed-use housing in such locations (not residential-only)

- ✓ M4-3: Review downtown zoning, addressing barriers to upper-story housing

- 2021-2022 Zoning overhaul, but other physical/code conditions remain challenging

- Sub-Goal M5: Capitalize on Fitchburg Airport as an asset for city & region

- M5-1: Actively market Fitchburg Municipal Airport (FIT)

- Target audience is aviation-related uses and non-aviation related support uses

- ✓ M5-2: Perform buildout analysis for development potential at FIT

- MassDev. site readiness project (2022) studied conceptual development layouts

## Goal: MIX OF BUSINESSES, cont.:

- M5-3: Promote commercial uses that cluster near airports
  - RFP approach will be used; restaurant being sought & also commercial/industrial uses
- Sub-Goal M6: Use strength of local healthcare sector for added growth
- M6-1: Convene focus group of healthcare & social assistance providers
  - Learn about current operations & future plans (any expansions or closures?)
- M6-2: Meet UMass Memorial & CHC re: latest plans at Nichols St. campus
  - Suggest establishing a birthing center there in reaction to loss of one in Leominster
- M6-3: Ask companies to share info on where employees come from
  - Consider added outreach to encourage workers to live in Fitchburg

## Goal: DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS:

*Enhance the city's distinct neighborhood commercial districts so that they meet local and area needs, and are vibrant and attractive places to shop and spend time.*

## Goal: **DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS:**

- Sub-Goal NC1: Ensure neighborhood commercial districts are well-defined & serve neighborhood needs.
- ✓ NC1-1: Review zoning permit data to understand local development trends
  - Uptick in purchase/reno. of smaller multi-family residential & numerous small biz launches
- ✓ NC1-2: During planning process, gather resident info on district priorities
  - Public input during 2021-2022 zoning overhaul provided insights on local needs
- ✓ NC1-3: Increase sit-down restaurants in neighborhood commercial districts
  - City made conscious effort to expand local dining options, to reduce consumer 'leakage'
- ✓ NC1-4: Identify concentrations of ethnic businesses; provide support to owners
  - Debut of Latino business expo in 2024; bilingual tech. assistance provided (both City & NewVue)

## Goal: **DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS:**

- Sub-Goal NC2: Establish high-quality design expectations for neighborhood commercial districts.

- ✓ NC2-1: Review dimensional requirements in neighborhood commercial districts
  - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
- NC2-2: Reduce # of billboards by prohibiting new & phasing out existing ones
  - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul; use amortization approach to gradually remove over time
- NC2-3: Assign DPW to remove (old) city-owned signs no longer relevant/needed
  - Occurred in downtown for Main/Boulder project; use same approach w/ neighborhood comml.
- NC2-4: Inventory gateway signs citywide & identify gaps or duplications
  - Inconsistency exists w/ outer-perimeter gateway signs & specific districts lack entry signage
- ✓ NC2-5: Determine if property owners can be required to remove old signs
  - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul; continued/consistent enforcement by city is needed

## Goal: **DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS:**

- Sub-Goal NC3: Develop cohesive directional signage program to guide visitors to Fitchburg's strongest amenities/assets.

→ NC3-1: Create aesthetically pleasing tourism signs informing of local attractions

- Signage types needed include:

→ NC3-1a: Historic District Signs (i.e. 'entering ... District')

- approved historic districts exist, but public unaware when at these locations

→ NC3-1b: Place-Naming Signs at key historic or cultural features

- i.e. Upper Common, Rollstone Boulder, Monument Park, etc.

→ NC3-1c: Wayfinding Signs along main thoroughfares & at key junctions

- FAM and FSU each have such signs; more cohesion needed, guiding to primary assets

## Goal: **DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS:**

- Sub-Goal NC4: Heighten awareness of each distinct neighborhood & its offerings.
- NC4-1: Consider installing gateway signage/artwork at entrance to each district
  - Bold murals added downtown were a start; entrance gateways need visual definition (citywide)
- NC4-2: Develop mktg. materials to showcase businesses (by district & by type)
  - 'Welcome Kits' project (2019) debuted effort; revised approach (by district) needed in update
- NC4-3: Consider series of community-building events in each district
  - grass-roots, community involvement needed to give such events a super-local flavor

## Goal: **COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE:**

*Highlight & build upon city's natural amenities, institutions & local events to become known as a center for outdoor recreational & cultural activity.*

- Sub-Goal RC1: Encourage recreational tourism & highlight existing rec. amenities.

## Goal: **COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE, cont.:**

- ✓ RC1-1: Engage the Fitchburg Trail Stewards in plans to connect/promote trails
  - City contributed funding toward creation of (2018) Fitchburg Trail Guide
- ✓ RC1-2: Revisit past plans & identify short-term projects to enhance parks/O.S.
  - 2022-2029 Open Space/Rec. Plan; Fitchburg 'Rock Walk' (Rollstone Hill) improvements
- RC1-3: Support creation of Marion Stoddard Trail (through downtown)
  - Aspirational connection of Steamline Trail to Coolidge Park (along Nashua River)
- ✓ RC1-4: Highlight parks/rec amenities in city's mktg. materials
  - Fitchburg Trail Guide a highly popular mktg. piece (both in English & Spanish)
- ✓ RC1-5: Consider expanding Riverfront Park (physical improvements)
  - Creation of a stage (now designed/funded); acquire land (pkg. lots) along Nashua River
- ✓ RC1-6(7): Identify possible location(s) for new hotel development
  - Vacant land at Fitchburg Airport; site at Game On property; parcel at Rt. 2A/Rt. 31

## Goal: **COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE, cont.:**

- **RC1-7(8): Consider install of 'zipline' from Rollstone Boulder to Crocker Field**
  - Aspirational big-idea, reflective of fun/recreation-in-outdoors theme for Fitchburg
- Sub-Goal RC2: Encourage recreational uses in appropriate spaces in city.
  - **RC2-1: City leaders to tour MA communities strongly rooted in outdoor rec.**
    - Charlemont, Millers Falls, Orange & others each have used rec. as their brand/identity
  - **RC2-2: Develop a 3-yr action plan w/ identified sites & rec/hospitality uses**
    - Expand on vision from recent (2022-2029) O.S. & Rec. Plan, w/ hospitality emphasis added
  - ✓ **RC2-3: Identify infrastructure needs to support festival events**
    - Design & funding secured for construction of permanent stage at Riverfront Park
  - ✓ **RC2-4: Update zoning to allow for commercial rec in rural areas**
    - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
  - ✓ **RC2-5: Meet w/ organizers of Longjo Classic (annual pro bike race)**
    - Gain input on lessons learned from yrs. hosting major event; race has ceased occurring

## Goal: **COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE, cont.:**

- RC2-6: Identify off-leash dog park(s) in city's Open Space/Rec Plan
  - Fitchburg Dog Park completed at Coolidge Park (led by grass-roots effort)
- RC2-7: Consider installation of seasonal outdoor skating rink
  - City had tradition at Coggshall Park; study of reviving either there or in downtown
- Sub-Goal RC3: Promote stewardship of city's unique natural environment.
  - RC3-1: Initiate planning to develop a shared-use path along Nashua River
    - Aims to better connect downtown to river; contained in Urban Renewal Plan update
  - RC3-2: Effectively orient & connect downtown to Nashua River
    - consider shared-use path; outdoor dining along river; construction of amphitheater/stage
  - RC3-3: Expansion of Riverfront Park (to both sides of river)
    - Consider relocating surface pkg. lots to elsewhere in downtown

## Goal: **COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE, cont.:**

- ✓ RC3-4: Revise zoning to ensure devt. best leverages city's natural amenities
  - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
- ✓ RC3-5: Use 'smart growth' principles to maintain clear urban/rural edge
  - 2020-2021 Zoning Ordinance overhaul
- ✓ RC3-6: Increase investment in street tree installation (combat 'heat island')
  - City is participant in 'Greening the Gateway Cities' program through MA DCR
- Sub-Goal RC4: Promote sense of community through outdoor activity & nature.
- ✓ RC4-1: Strive to have all residents live within ½ mile of an outdoor amenity
  - 2022-2029 Open Space & Recreation Plan (update approved)
- RC4-2: Host annual lecture series on nature & natural phenomena
  - Partner w/ public library, historical society, FSU & other groups/organizations
- ✓ RC4-3: Formalize 'Rock Walk' from Upper Common to top of Rollstone Hill
  - Physical improvements and self-guided trail tour completed (grant funding & volunteerism)

## Goal: **COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE, cont.:**

- RC4-4: Capitalize on city's natural topography to recruit outdoor rec. ventures
  - Zipline, rock climbing, glamping, drone school, etc.
- RC4-5: Engage FSU through stewardship of recreation areas (students, faculty)
  - Volunteerism for maintenance of local parks, trails
- Sub-Goal RC5: **Grow the arts community in city & increase artist participation.**
  - ✓ RC5-1: Visit other cities with strong artist communities to learn their path
    - Close collaboration with other Gateway Cities strong in arts (New Bedford, Lynn, Lowell)
  - ✓ RC5-2: Encourage participation by non-artists in events to heighten awareness
    - Community Mural Institute (CMI) project; Main Street Studios downtown facility; chalk art festival
  - ✓ RC5-3: Leverage Fitchburg Arts Community devt. to establish city as ctr. for arts
    - MassDevt. awarded 'Creative Cities' designation in 2022 w/ funding for staff & programming

## Goal: **COMMERCIAL RECREATION & CULTURE, cont.:**

- Sub-Goal RC6: Increase the number of cultural events & venues in Fitchburg.
- RC6-1: Create a plan for arts & art making downtown (both temp. & permanent)
  - Prepare a 'downtown Fitchburg cultural plan' to guide future art activities within the district
- RC6-2: Visit Lowell MA to gather info about annual 'Kinetic Sculpture Festival'
  - Learn how event was originally conceived & how broader community became engaged

## Goal: **TRANSPORTATION:**

*Make transportation into & around Fitchburg easy, fun & affordable.*

- Sub-Goal T1: Make Fitchburg increasingly pedestrian & cycling friendly.
- ✓ T1-1: Continue work w/ MassDOT on 'Complete Streets' implementation
  - Improvements at Upper Common and Main/Boulder project, both within downtown
- ✓ T1-2: Visit Lowell MA to gather info about annual 'Kinetic Sculpture Festival'
  - City maintains representation at MRPC meetings (also MPO meetings) on regional transportation

## Goal: TRANSPORTATION, cont.:

- ✓ T1-3: Allocate funding in capital plan for engineering/design of key roads
  - City dedicated ARPA funding toward John Fitch Hwy resiliency design (preparing for TIP)
- ✓ T1-4: Ensure Twin Cities Rail Trail (TCRT) gets funded & built
  - TCRT Phase 1 now complete; Phase 2 design complete w/ construction in 2025
- T1-5: Initiate planning to develop shared-use path along Nashua River
  - Project mentioned in multiple plans (URP update, Open Space & Rec plan); design pending
- T1-6: Establish a bicycle/pedestrian commission to create plan
  - Existing groups are informal/ad hoc (i.e. Friends of Twin Cities Rail Trail)
- ✓ T1-7: Seek TIP funding for improvements to key gateway roadways
  - Currently preparing John Fitch Hwy corridor design for acceptance onto TIP
- Sub-Goal T2: Increase residents' ability to travel without private vehicle.
- T2-1: Update zoning to allow for by-right conversion to car share spaces
  - Consider allowing up to 3 space conversions at commercial pkg. in non-residential zones

## Goal: **TRANSPORTATION, cont.:**

- T2-2: Pursue having commercial bike-share, including dockless option
  - Dockless options have been problematic in other cities; e-scooter rental now also emerging
- Sub-Goal T3: Increase attractiveness & utilization of public (MART) bus service.
  - T3-1: Analyze existing bus route map & compare w/ historic trolley routes
    - Identify where gaps in service to established older neighborhoods may exist
  - T3-2: Survey residents (& FSU students) for feedback on how to gain ridership
    - City should partner w/ MART to implement this outreach; include businesses
  - T3-3: Work with MART on possible expansion of routes (or extended hours)
    - Lack of bus shelters or official stops (flag-down service in some areas) deters ridership
- Sub-Goal T4: Increase attractiveness & utilization of public (MART) bus service.
  - ✓ T4-1: Improve pedestrian experience between MBTA, FSU & downtown areas
    - 'Complete Streets' improvements made during Main/Boulder project & at Upper Common

## Goal: **TRANSPORTATION, cont.:**

- T4-2: City to be proactive in redesign for Water St. & Laurel St. bridges
  - Pedestrian and cycle safety are key; underside aesthetics (along Boulder Dr) vital too
- T4-3: Develop a 3-yr action plan w/ identified sites & rec/hospitality uses
  - Expand on vision from recent (2022-2029) O.S. & Rec. Plan, w/ hospitality emphasis added
- ✓ T4-4: Request that Great Wolf Lodge promote MBTA access via MART bus
  - NOTE: GWL operates on-demand van shuttle service for its customers & staff
- T4-5: City together with GWL should request Sat. service for MART route #11
  - Connection to MBTA commuter rail is important for easy tourism access
- Sub-Goal T5: Improve roadway maintenance at key gateways & comml. areas.
- T5-1: Identify a series of roadway project needed to strengthen econ. devt.
  - Devise necessary implementation schedule, identifying when design/construction to occur
- T5-2: Set aside funding annually (i.e. in CIP) for transp. analyses and design
  - City to create a pipeline of (25%-75% design) roadway projects; get onto TIP when ready

## Goal: **TRANSPORTATION, cont.:**

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- ✓ T5-3: Maintain active participation in region's MPO
  - Fitchburg has representation at all Montachusett Region MPO meetings
- ✓ T5-4: Regularly submit projects to MPO for inclusion in TIP
  - Fitchburg actively submits roadway projects to Montachusett Region MPO for TIP inclusion
- ✓ T5-5: Proactively pursue other funding sources for roadway improvements
  - City actively uses MassWorks grant program; use of EDA grant(s) to be considered
- T5-6: Aim to increase general funding toward infrastructure maintenance
  - MA's Chapter 90 funds will never be adequate, so city's must devise other sources
- Sub-Goal T6: Capitalize on city's many bridges as visually defining elements.
  - T6-1: City to be proactive in redesign for Water St. & Laurel St. bridges
    - Use thematic lighting or painting to create artistic statements with bridge projects (i.e. Zakim)
  - T6-2: Establish regular maintenance schedule for long, key roadway corridors
    - Regular removal of trash, debris, overgrowth is key to having good image at gateways
  - T6-3: Along Nashua River, remove overgrowth obscuring view of waterway
    - After consultation with Conservation Commission, address overgrowth proactively

# RECOMMENDATIONS:

## ➡ Extend Plan's Implementation:

- ➡ *Additional 1-2 years*
- ➡ *Acknowledges economic stall from pandemic*

## ➡ Devise new items to include:

- ➡ **Changing demographics** (*now 30% Latino*)
- ➡ **Cannabis industry** (*multiple established cultivators*)
- ➡ **Prolonged spike in e-commerce** (*warehouse development*)

# **BONUS SECTION:**

# Fitchburg has become a top tourism destination in North Central MA region

## COMMERCIAL RECREATION:

### ➤ Great Wolf Lodge

- \$1.5 million - hotels tax revenue  
(during FY2023)
- Second largest employer in city  
(approx. 600 staff)
- Attracts guests from all N.E. states  
(generate year-round visitorship)

### ➤ Game On Fitchburg

- Host to major sporting tournaments  
(Bay State Games - summer 2023)
- Venue for specialty events  
(Plastic City ComiCon - summer 2023)



# Fitchburg has become a top tourism destination in North Central MA region

## ARTS/CULTURE:

- **Fitchburg Art Museum:**  
*annual events ('Art in Bloom') & featured exhibits*
- **Fitchburg State University:** *performances, lectures & cultural programming*
- **Two (2) Microbreweries:**  
*River Styx Brewing & Thirsty Robot Brewing Co.*
- **Hollis Hills Farm:** *Agri-tourism; summer/fall live music & outdoor dining; family movie nights*



# Fitchburg's goal to become a regionally significant dining destination is now taking shape

## ► **MULTIPLE NEW RESTAURANTS OPENED IN 2023:**

- **Brazilian Flavor** (377 John Fitch Hwy)
- **Oliver's Café at the Falls** (44 Old Princeton Rd)
- **Rise & Grind Café** (805 Main St)
- **Dario's On Main** (655 Main St)
- **Singapore** (170 Whalon St) – *new owners successfully 'reboot' an old favorite*
- **Kiki's Ramen** (35 Airport Rd)
- **Beyti's Mediterranean Grill** (548 John Fitch Hwy)
- **Pauper's Pantry** (695 Main St)
- **Mamajuana Restaurant** (423 Main St)

# Recently Completed Developments:

## ➤ **E-Commerce Warehouse** (135 Intervale Rd)

- 150,000 sq. ft. modern, state-of-the-art facility
- Amazon tenancy to occur in 2024
- Redevelopment of former Simonds Saw factory

## ➤ **Apartments at Moran Square** (10 Main St)

- Mixed-use redevelopment of 2 historic bldgs. connected by new construction
- Created 44 residential apartments (studio, 1, 2 & 3 bedroom units)
- Created 3 commercial storefronts
- Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
- Located at planned terminus for *Twin Cities Rail Trail*

# Apartments at Moran Square (10 Main St.)

## Transit-Oriented, Mixed-Use Development

44 residential apts. & 3 commercial storefronts



# Recently Completed Developments:

## MIXED-USE REDEVELOPMENT IN DOWNTOWN DISTRICT:

### ➤ 759-769 Main Street:

- Redevelopment of former '*HUB International Insurance*' bldg.
- 4 Modern Residential Apartments, fully leased (*on 2nd floor*)
- 2 Commercial Storefronts, fully leased (*on ground level*)

### ➤ 655 Main Street:

- Redevelopment of former '*Fitchburg Gas & Light*' bldg.
- 3 Modern Residential Apartments, fully leased (*on 2nd floor*)
- New restaurant ("Dario's") in commercial storefront (*ground level*)

### ➤ 805 Main Street:

- Redevelopment of former '*Research Results*' bldg.
- 8 Modern Residential Apartments, fully leased (*on 2 upper floors*)
- New restaurant ("Rise & Grind") in commercial storefront (*ground level*)

**759-769 Main Street:**



**805 Main Street:**



**655 Main Street:**



# Major New Project Underway:

- **Fitchburg Arts Community** *(now in construction)*
  - Redevelopment of the former B.F. Brown Jr. High School site
  - Creates **68 live/work residential units** for creative/artisan microenterprises
  - Adaptive reuse of **3 historic buildings** into a campus
  - Directly abuts Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM)



Photo Credit: Andrew Van Hazinga

# Major Project Underway:

## ► Fitchburg Pubic Library

- **\$40 million** renovation & expansion
- *Funded through Commonwealth, ARPA, municipal & foundation sources*
- *Preservation of midcentury modern primary façade*
- *Reconstruction of youth library component*
- **Incorporating 21<sup>st</sup> Century features** (Learning Lab, Makerspace, Teen Room, Community Room)



# On the Near Horizon:

*(developments to come)*

## **“IVER MILLS” (87-91 River St.):**

- redevelopment of Iver Johnson factory site

## **280-288 MAIN STREET:**

- *mixed-use redevelopment of former “Santander” bldg.*

## **“GATEWAY APTS.” (Main St. & Snow St.)**

- *2 phases of new construction; transit-oriented apts.*

## **“TURNING POINT CAMPUS”**

- *biotech manufacturing at former Munksjo site*

# QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:



**Thank you!**